

Consumer Alert

Providing consumers with knowledge to make informed choices and decisions.

CELEBRATING 30 YEARS

A Publication of the South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs

Brandolyn Thomas Pinkston, Administrator

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Trinity Collegiate Team Wins

South Carolina State LifeSmarts Competition

(Back row, left to right: Zachary Kennedy, Bern Lavespere, Eric Anderson, Ashley Lane, Carolyn Vaught, Samuel Steele. Front row: Brian Cauble.) Story on page 2.

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Fraud Alert

South Carolina consumers have reported several variations of eBay fraud. While not originating from eBay itself, these scams are the work of swindlers who prey on eBay customers.

eBay Verification E-mail: Swindlers send consumers e-mails that claim eBay's fraud prevention systems have "detected unusual activity" on the consumer's account. The e-mail then requests the consumer to link to another site to enter "the necessary information" in order to reinstate the account. While these e-mails look official as they utilize eBay's signature logo and similar web address, they are a ploy to obtain consumers' bank details.

When Buying an Item Through eBay, always:

- Check the seller's feedback. Be cautious of sellers with little or no feedback, or negative comments.
- Compare listings to see if the price is fair. Although it is an old adage, it still applies: if it seems too good to be true, it probably is.
- Be wary of sellers who claim to have hard-to-find items, especially jewelry, electronics, and items that are sold out in stores.

About the South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs:

Established by the Consumer Protection Code in 1974, The South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs represents the interests of South Carolina consumers. Our mission is to protect consumers from inequities in the marketplace through advocacy, mediation, enforcement and education. For more information, visit www.scconsumer.gov.

LifeSmarts continued from page 1:



(Front row, left to right: Brian Cauble; Zachary Kennedy; Eric Anderson; David Wilkins, Speaker of the House of Representatives; Bern Lavespere. Back row, right to left: Brandolyn Thomas Pinkston, SCDCA Administrator; Sherry G. King, SCDCA Educational Services Director; Samuel Steele; Marilyn Marschel, Trinity Collegiate Lifesmarts coach.)

After a morning of competitive fun on March 4, 2005, Trinity Collegiate edged out F.E. DuBose's LifeSmarts team to become South Carolina's LifeSmarts champion for the fourth year in a row.

"We had fun with the competition. A lot of it is practical knowledge, stuff (we) can use," Trinity Collegiate assistant coach, Crystal Atkins, said.

Trinity senior, Samuel Steele, said he utilized the knowledge he garnered from participating in the past three LifeSmarts competitions when shopping during South Carolina's last no-tax weekend. "The store had a sign that read everything was fifty percent off. I thought an item was going to be five dollars, but they charged me (double), so I asked to speak to the manager and ended up paying the advertised price of five dollars."

On April 12, the Trinity Collegiate LifeSmarts team recognized Financial Literacy Day at the South Carolina State House, alongside David Wilkins, speaker of the South Carolina House of Representatives; Jerry Govan, of the South Carolina House of Representatives and Ellen Still, Deputy Superintendent of the South Carolina Department of Education.

Trinity Collegiate LifeSmarts coach Marilyn Marschel said, "I was thrilled to hear the speaker say there is going to be funding for teachers so they can in turn educate students on issues of financial literacy."

Trinity Collegiate senior Zachary Kennedy agreed, saying, "It's incredibly important that the State have a financial literacy program. (Students) can learn how to invest, stay out of debt, and (ultimately) be financially secure."

As the State's LifeSmarts champion, Trinity Collegiate represented South Carolina at the national competition in San Francisco on April 16-19, 2005.

If you would like more information about LifeSmarts, or would like to participate in next year's competition, contact Sherry Gore King at (803) 734.4195 or by e-mail at King@dca.state.sc.us.

Questions About a Business?

The South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs' Buyer Beware List has answers. Check the list out at http://www.scoconsumer.gov/buyer_beware_list.pdf in order to protect yourself as a consumer of products and services in South Carolina.

If you have questions about other businesses, or would like a copy of the list, contact the South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs at **(803) 734.4200, 800.922.1594 (toll-free in South Carolina)**, or at scdca@dca.state.sc.us.



(Shawn Boynton, Lower Richland High School Family and Consumer Science teacher examines the workshop's pamphlets)

Consumer Product Safety Workshop

In order to improve the safety and lives of South Carolinians, the Department of Consumer Affairs and the Consumer Product Safety Commission co-sponsored *Staying Alive in 2005*, on April 5, 2005.

The workshop, which focused on the areas of senior safety, casualty prevention, and awareness, featured representatives from the South Carolina State Fire Marshall's office; South Carolina Lieutenant Governor's Office on Aging; the South Carolina Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation, Division of Fire and Life Safety; the Silver-Haired Legislatures; and the Department of Health and Environmental Control.

Consumer Product Safety Commission Recall

Around 55,000 Mr. Heater "Big Buddy" and "Tough Buddy" portable propane heaters have been recalled. The heaters have been found to leak propane, posing a fire hazard if an ignition is present.

Consumers should stop using these products immediately unless otherwise instructed. For more information log onto www.recall.gov, or call the South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs at (803) 734.4200, or 800.922.1594 (toll-free in South Carolina).

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